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TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE ELISSA WRIGHT

RAISED H.B. No. 5574, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT BIOSCIENCE CAPABILITIES ASSESSMENT REPORT

Commerce Committee Public Hearing  
March 18, 2014

Senator LeBeau, Representative Perone, members of the Commerce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **Raised H.B. No. 5574, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Southeastern Connecticut Bioscience Capabilities Assessment Report.***

I fully support this proposal to implement recommendations of the Southeastern Connecticut Bioscience Capabilities Assessment Report of December 2013 and build on last year's legislative initiative to develop a plan to stimulate innovation, support business formation, and spur growth in start-up and spin-off niches centered on existing strengths in industry clusters in pharmaceuticals and bioscience, defense manufacturing, marine and maritime activities, and entrepreneurial activities associated with these historic core industries in Southeastern Connecticut.

In particular, the specific actions contemplated in this bill would concentrate welcome attention on research and innovation in areas of life science, biotechnology, clean energy industries, and other investments of this kind as key components of a concerted plan to grow jobs, address a lack of diversification, and expand economic opportunity in the region through existing industries as well as emerging business sectors.

Specific actions in the plan would include:

- Outreach efforts to business leaders and experts in life sciences and other emerging, high-tech fields, and the development and deployment of a well-thought-out marketing plan to promote the assets, quality of life, and talented workforce in the region.

- Establishment of a forum, or working group, of business and community leaders to encourage planning, enhance networking capacity, and promote technology transfer, knowledge exchange, cross-fertilization of professionals from different fields, and new applications with the potential to grow jobs in companies in emerging fields as well as more established biopharmaceutical and defense research and manufacturing.
- Establishment of an innovation/ incubator center and an online, virtual convening place to provide a central focus that is now lacking for the region's technology-based economic development activities. The center might encompass R&D, seed capital, mentoring, technical assistance, and other resources to help commercialize innovations and the growth of high-tech businesses in the region.

Southeastern Connecticut is perfectly situated to strengthen partnerships with the many elite colleges and universities the area, including but not limited to UConn and UConn Avery Point, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Connecticut College, the Coast Guard Research and Development Center, and Three Rivers Community College in areas of science, technology and innovation, including marine science, the life sciences, agriculture and aquaculture, advanced manufacturing technology, homeland security, and clean energy industries.

Now as the worst of the recession begins to pass, we in Southeastern Connecticut need to demonstrate through the opportunities presented in this bill that we can benefit from our many advantages – a skilled and educated workforce; an impressive array of academic and research institutions; available infrastructure to support research projects and start-up firms; and several locational advantages including an area rich in amenities and a geographic nexus in proximity to some of the most dynamic research, economic, and innovation centers in the nation – and that we can improve upon and leverage these assets to reverse a shift in employment structure and create new opportunities for our highly educated talent pool, which offers a basis for dynamic growth, through support and development of bioscience and biotechnology in the region.

An increased commitment by the state to bolster research and innovation in emerging bioscience, pharmaceutical, biotechnology and related fields, if enacted, will be a catalyst for future growth, and improve capacity, resilience, and economic diversification to help grow jobs and build a stronger, broad-based economy for the region going forward. As the Southeastern CT Bioscience Capabilities Assessment Report aptly notes in its executive summary "...the time is clearly now, before the last waves of younger, highly educated, non-retired scientists completely migrate out of the region in search of jobs."

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present testimony on this issue today.